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LETTER DATED 14 JANUARY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to forward a copy of a statement dated 13 January 1998 issued by the office of the President, Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, on the implementation of the Conakry Peace Plan.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) James O. C. JONAH
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Statement dated 13 January 1998 issued by the office of the
President, Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, on the implementation
of the Conakry Peace Plan

It is almost three months since the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Committee of Five and the junta in Freetown signed the Conakry Peace Plan for the restoration of the constitutionally elected Government of President Kabbah by 22 April 1998. With only 13 weeks to that deadline, the illegal regime is now blaming ECOWAS and representatives of the United Nations, unjustifiably so, for the current impasse in the implementation of the Plan. This is a disturbing development.

Now, at this late hour, the junta has come up with some preposterous demands, some of which are new, while others are recycled from its repertoire of devious tactics aimed at sabotaging the Plan and continuing its illegal occupation of the seat of power. This is why it is relevant to ask: what right does the illegal regime have to dictate how ECOWAS should reorganize itself and suggest that it radically change its decision-making procedures? By what authority is the junta insisting on the composition of the ECOWAS monitoring group in Sierra Leone? How can the junta dictate what combatants should or should not be disarmed? It may be recalled that President Kabbah, in a statement in December 1997, had addressed this issue. And finally, who gave the illegal regime the power to unilaterally determine where the office of the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy should be located and the number of nights he should spend in Freetown?

The illegal regime complains that it has been completely isolated by the ECOWAS Committee of Five, and by international agencies, in certain key areas of the implementation process, and that it was denied representation at the recent meeting of the Committee. The junta has failed to realize that it cannot demand, nor can it highjack international recognition or legitimacy.

The people of Sierra Leone have demonstrated unequivocally that the junta has no mandate to represent them or speak for them in any international meeting, or to participate in any such meeting where the welfare of the people of Sierra Leone is being addressed, except with the consent or acquiescence of the democratically elected Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Indeed, the international community has reiterated that "the Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah is the sole and legitimate Government of Sierra Leone". In particular, the Security Council has also acknowledged the legitimacy of the Government of President Kabbah. So the regime has absolutely no right to challenge or even to question the rights and privileges which regional and international organizations accord the President and his legitimate Government.

President Kabbah's Government has the sovereign authority to set up radio facilities on any location within the territory of Sierra Leone to broadcast objective news and information to the people. It is about time the junta understands that it has no legal or moral right to interfere with the transmissions of those facilities.

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It should be emphasized that the junta and its cohorts are not even qualified to give a legal and credible interpretation of the provisions of the legally binding Security Council resolution 1132 (1997) on sanctions against the illegal regime. As ECOWAS recently noted, the junta has violated the sanctions and embargo by upgrading the airstrip at Magburaka for the illegal importation of arms and other supplies, and the travel restrictions on members of the junta and their families are being violated.

Furthermore, the junta has no moral right to complain and accuse the international community and Secretary-General Kofi Annan of downplaying the welfare of the people of Sierra Leone and of ignoring the deteriorating humanitarian crisis when, in fact, the junta has been diverting humanitarian assistance destined for the suffering people to members of its so-called ruling council and their diamond-mining armed officers. It is this same junta whose leaders and their agents continue to seize merchandise from shopkeepers, terrorize innocent civilians, and loot private homes and even foreign embassies.

It is sad that at this crucial stage of the implementation process, we are still faced with the problem of "one illegal regime with many discordant voices"; one regime with a dozen spokesmen endowed with the ability to fill the airwaves with conflicting statements on the same issues. Soon after the coup d'état in May 1997, the junta stated that it would hand over power within two months. It also spoke about another Bintumani-type consultative conference followed by elections. Then, in July, after its shocking announcement that it would not hand over power until the year 2001, the world was told that the head of the junta had made a mistake and that he did not really mean what he had broadcast to the nation. Recently, within days of his announcement in a British Broadcasting Corporation interview that the deadline of 22 April 1998 for the restoration of the democratically elected Government of President Kabbah may not be met, another senior member of the junta claimed that the junta leader's statement was misunderstood.

Therefore, the latest public statement that the junta is "still committed to the peaceful and successful implementation of the Conakry Peace Plan within the stipulated time-frame" should be received with some apprehension and scepticism.

If, indeed, as it claims, the illegal regime is committed to ensuring "that power is handed over back to ... President Kabbah", it should not inject any preconditions and impose on the international community its own self-serving interpretation of both the Security Council sanctions resolution and the ECOWAS Peace Plan it signed in Conakry in October 1997. These delaying tactics are unacceptable.

The people of Sierra Leone and their democratically elected Government under President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah will not accept any changes or amendments to the Conakry Peace Plan which would result in an extension of the deadline beyond 22 April 1998.

If the illegal regime is so concerned about the plight of the people of Sierra Leone, it should refrain from its unjustified criticisms of ECOWAS, the United Nations system and their personnel who are risking their own lives to bring peace to Sierra Leone. It should also immediately withdraw its unilateral demands, and make an honest and final commitment to facilitate the implementation of the Conakry Peace Plan.
